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Khrushchev's Secret Weapon Blew Up on Pad, Spy Reports

LONDON (AP)—The "fantas-

tic" secret weapon that Nikita Khrushchev rattled at the West in 1960 was a nuclear-propelled rocket that blew up on the launching pad, killing the Soviet commander of rocket forces and 300 others, the newspaper Guardian said yesterday.

The Guardian quoted from what it said were secret reports of Oleg Penkovsky, a Russian who was sentenced to death by a Soviet court in 1963 for spying for the West. He was close to influential Kremlin leaders and was regarded in London and Washington as the most valuable Western spy behind the Iron Curtain.

Victor Zorza, Communist affairs expert of the Guardian, apparently obtained an advance look at the spy's reports, which are being published soon under the title "The Penkovsky Papers" in Britain and the United States.

Premature Testing

Zorza said Penkovsky reported that former Premier Khrushchev's boast early in 1960 of a secret weapon annoyed Soviet military men and forced a premature testing of the rocket.

In the fall of 1960, scientists assembled to rush through a test in time for the October Revolution anniversary, Zorza reported.

"The countdown went according to plan" Zorza said, "But the new missile failed to leave the ground. The observers waited for some 20 minutes, then came out of the shelter."

"At this point the missile exploded, killing 300 people, among them the commander-in-chief of the Soviet missile forces, Marshal Nedelin."

The Russians announced Oct. 25, 1960, that Marshal Mitrofan I. Nedelin and several other officers had been killed in the line of duty in an air crash.

In an address to the Soviet Parliament on Jan. 14, 1960, Khrushchev declared:

"The Central Committee of the Communist party and the Soviet government can inform you, comrade deputies, that through the weapons we now have are formidable weapons, the weapon we have in the hatching stage today is even more perfect, even more formidable."

Termed Fantastic

"This weapon under development, you might say in the portfolio of the scientists, is a fantastic one."

Then on March 16, 1962, in a speech in the Kremlin, Khrushchev indicated his "fantastic" new weapon had been perfected, although he did not refer to it in that way. Nor did he mention his previous boast.

"Our scientists and engineers," he said, "have created a new intercontinental rocket which they call global. This rocket is invulnerable to anti-missile weapons."

Any nuclear-powered rocket would be global, since its fuel would permit it to make extended flights before zeroing in on targets.

Khrushchev said the new weapons could outwit U.S. radar and warning systems in the north polar region because "the new global rockets can fly around the world in any direction and strike a blow at any set target."

On the diplomatic side, Zorza reported the most important

intelligence furnished by Penkovsky was that the Kremlin's hand could be successfully called during the 1961 Berlin crisis.

In that year, Khrushchev threatened to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany and then back up the German Communists if they cut off Western access to Berlin.

Lacked Force

In repeated messages, Penkovsky said that Khrushchev's bark was worse than his bite and that Soviet Russia did not have the military force to back up the threats.

When President Kennedy called U.S. reservists to duty and the West made it plain it would fight if need be, Khrushchev pulled back and gave the impression there was no hurry about signing the separate treaty.

Zorza said the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has made Penkovsky's papers available for publication probably as part of its propaganda battle with Soviet intelligence agencies.

Penkovsky was sentenced to death for espionage in a 1963 trial at which he was accused of passing secret information to British businessman Grenville Wynne. Although there was no official announcement, it is presumed Penkovsky was executed.

Wynne was given a prison sentence at the trial but was later released.

Wynne said in London that there is "absolutely no doubt" that the Penkovsky papers are genuine.

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